2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

CHAPTER XV

MUSLIM SHEIKHS AND COPTIC SAINTS

THE Egyptian peasants venerate a number of holy men and women to whom miraculous powers have been ascribed, either during their lifetime or after their death Such a holy person is given the title of sheikh. The word sheikh means literally an old man, and a man who is advanced in years is often addressed as Sheikh so and so as a term of respect. The word also signifies the head of an Arab tribe, the leading man in a village, and, finally, a learned man (*i.e.*, one learned in the sacred writings).

Certain of these holy men and women are venerated all over the country, the cults connected with them having become part of the general popular religion. But, besides these greater personages, there are innumerable local saints, who, however, often draw their devotees from localities beyond the boundaries of their villages.

However great may be the veneration paid to a saint in his lifetime, the honour he receives after his death is far greater. Among the Muslims it is the custom to erect over the grave of such a person a small whitewashed building, crowned with a dome, the outer and inner walls being usually decorated with line-drawings in colours and with inscriptions consisting of passages from the Ḳorān (see Figs. 139, 140). In many cases it is customary to provide a 'servant' (Fig. 138), or sometimes a number of 'servants,' whose salary is paid out of an endowment in land or money, augmented by the donations of those who visit the tomb. This man, or it may be a woman, is known as "the servant of the sheikh," and the office may descend from father to son. Besides the land surrounding the tomb, the sacred precincts may include a well, the water of which is supposed to be endowed with miraculous properties.

Sometimes a stone, or a heap of stones, or a tree or clump of trees, alone mark the last resting-place of a departed sheikh, but when there is a domed tomb a tree or trees are usually associated